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Nationalist Movement

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THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT.

(An article written for the "Canadian Magazine" and reprinted from the issue of January, 1911. The article was republished in part by the "American Review of Reviews" in its issue of February, 1911.)

"Mais, c'est une révolte" (Why, it is a revolt), said the luckless Louis to the Duke de Liancourt, who brought him news of the people's rising.

"Sire," answered Liancourt, "it is not a revolt; it is a revolution."

And when the result of the Drummond and Arthabaska election was announced there were many persons old in the political game who were inclined to exclaim, "It is not a revolt; it is a revolution."

The significance of the election, in which a usual Government majority of 1,200 was turned into an opposition majority of over 200, cannot be ignored. Let it be remembered that in the general election of 1896 the Liberal party carried forty-eight out of the sixty-five seats of the Province of Quebec; in 1900 the Laurier Government carried fifty-eight seats, in 1904, fifty-four seats; and after the last general election in 1908 fifty-three of the Quebec seats were found to be in the Liberal column. The Government's majority in the present Parliament is around fifty. Presuming that there would be little change in the representation from the other provinces, it would require a turnover of from twenty-five to thirty seats in the Province of Quebec to bring about an entire change in the alignment of political parties. There are those claiming to be good judges of political prospects who maintain that in the event of a general election with the Navy question as the paramount issue there would assuredly be a marked change in the political map, especially as regards Quebec. Be that as it may, the situation is such as to be of more than passing interest.

There were doubtless several contributory causes leading to the defeat of the Government candidate in Drummond and Arthabaska, but undoubtedly the main factor was the campaign conducted by Mr. Henri Bourassa and his lieutenants in the Nationalist movement, with the active co-operation and support of Mr. F. D. Monk, M.P., and other French-Canadian Conservatives.

It is not my intention to discuss in this article the merits of the Navy question or to deal with events from any party viewpoint. My object is to explain from the utterances of its responsible and accredited representatives what the Nationalist movement means and to give a pen picture of its leader and of some of those most conspicuously identified with the movement.

And first as to its leader. The question was recently put to me by a friend from Ontario—a man of prominence and influence—“What kind of a man is Bourassa and what does he really stand for?” Let me now try to answer that question as fully as will be possible within the limited space of a magazine article. The main facts of Mr. Bourassa's public career are tolerably well known to all Canadians. Born in Montreal in 1868, the son of Napoleon Bourassa, an eminent French-Canadian author and painter, who married a daughter of Louis Joseph Papineau, the great French-Canadian statesman and tribune. Henri Bourassa was educated by private tuition in his native city. In 1886 he removed to Montebello, so long the home of his distinguished grandfather. Mr. Bourassa was Mayor of Montebello from 1890 to 1894 and in 1897 was elected Mayor of Papineauville. At the general election of 1896 he was elected as a Liberal to represent Labelle in the House of Commons, but resigned his seat in 1899 in order to vindicate the position he had taken on the constitutional aspect of the participation of Canada in the South African war. He was re-elected by acclamation and was again returned at the general elections of 1900 and 1904. He subsequently left the Federal arena to enter Quebec politics, and in the provincial general election of 1908 he was returned both by St. James (Montreal) and St. Hyacinthe, defeating in the former division, after a memorable contest, the Prime Minister of the Province, Sir Lomer Gouin. He decided to sit for St. Hyacinthe, is still a member of the Legis-

lature, and is also the director and editor of "Le Devoir" newspaper published in Montreal. Such are the bald facts of Mr. Bourassa's career. They convey no idea of the man's personality, and it is in his unique personality that much of Mr. Bourassa's potency lies.

What kind of man is he? Picture to yourself a man of forty-two years, in the full vigour of life, of medium height, compact in build, alert and energetic in his movements; of dark complexion, with a short pointed beard, his shapely head crowned by closely-cropped hair sprinkled with gray, and looking upon you from two piercing eyes that reflect a keen and subtle intellect, and you have Henri Bourassa the man. His whole make-up is one of vitality and power. In conversation he is quick and animated, speaking English and French with equal fluency. Frequently in the course of conversation, a smile will light up his countenance, indicating that subtle attribute that may best be designated as charm. For Mr. Bourassa is a charming man, with a great deal of the idealist about him. He is also a man of wide reading and deep study, in fact, there are not many men who are better informed in the various aspects of British life and history than the man whom many are fond of denouncing as anti-British. His deep knowledge of parliamentary and constitutional principles is not only shown in his public discourses, but it is apparent even in the most cursory conversation. Mr. Bourassa is no stranger in the sister provinces, he has been heard at Toronto, he has spoken at Halifax and St. John and at other points in the Maritime Provinces, and he has everywhere met with a most cordial reception.

Striking as is Mr. Bourassa's personality and charming as he is as a conversationalist, it is upon the hustings that his power is supreme. The Nationalist leader is essentially an orator—a great popular tribune. It has been my privilege frequently during the past quarter of a century to be upon the same platform and to listen to the greatest French-Canadian orators of that period, men who rank with the greatest orators that the French-Canadian race has produced—Chapleau, Mercier, Laurier, and last, but certainly not least, Bourassa. Chapleau and Mercier in their prime were men of powerful build, great physical force and magnetic qualities,

and by their eloquence they were able to sway vast multitudes. Laurier, though never a strong man physically and inferior in this respect to his great rivals in eloquence, possessed in his prime the art of captivating and swaying an audience, and his influence as an orator was increased by his striking personal appearance—almost æsthetic as it was. The passage of years, while it has diminished his vigour as a speaker, has made his appearance the more striking.

But great as were Chapleau, Mercier and Laurier in their days of power, not one of them could electrify a popular gathering as Mr. Bourassa can. Not only does he appear to be himself transformed, but it seems as if his eloquence hypnotises the whole assemblage. I have stood beside him on many notable occasions and have watched him closely and witnessed the evidence of his unique power. I heard him in the St. James campaign; I stood near to him when he was addressing ten thousand people gathered on the Place d'Armes to commemorate Dollard's heroic exploit; I listened to him as he spoke in Notre Dame Church during the Eucharistic congress; I was in the audience when he addressed twenty thousand people on the Champ de Mars, protesting against insults to the Christian faith; and I was on the platform when following the Drummond and Arthabaska election he received a great ovation from ten thousand of his countrymen gathered in the Ontario rink in Montreal. On all those occasions his power as an orator was conspicuous. Mr. Bourassa has his peculiarities as a speaker, as all great orators have. He begins quietly, and if you have never heard him before you may be disappointed at the outset and wonder if this is indeed the great orator you have heard so much about. But wait. It is not long before you are listening with interest, the spell of his voice has begun to work, and as he proceeds a wonderful change is wrought. Stronger and more resonant becomes his voice till it reaches out to the furthest limits of the audience, his countenance, in fact his whole figure, seems to become transformed; his gestures are more frequent and effective, his utterances more and more forcible. He is constantly changing his position on the platform. One minute he directly faces his audience from the centre of the stand, addressing his

hearers quietly without the least motion, anon he raises his arm and emphasises a particular point with a dramatic gesture, frequently striking his breast; at times, as if exalted by his subject and the occasion, he will launch into a torrent of eloquence that will rouse the audience to fever heat. Some of his most eloquent periods are delivered as he leans over the railing of the platform, fixed and motionless, till suddenly rising to his full height and seeming to become taller than he really is, he concludes with a burst of impassioned eloquence, directing his invective against his opponents, his words falling like hammer strokes. And as the orator's mood varies, so does that of the audience. At times a deep silence will prevail, then there will be marks of approval and finally an outburst of wild cheering and enthusiastic gesticulation.

Such is Henri Bourassa the orator. And let it be said, in common fairness, that frequently as I have heard him, I have never heard him indulge in anti-British utterances. During the memorable campaign in St. James I heard him deliver a splendid eulogy of the British flag and the protection enjoyed by all races beneath its folds, and I heard him, addressing a great gathering of his countrymen, make this emphatic declaration: "I am loyal to the traditions of the race from which I have sprung, but I am also loyal to the British flag, which we all love and admire."

It is not only as a speaker that Mr. Bourassa shines. He can also—which is not usual with great public speakers—wield a trenchant pen, as the frequent articles which he contributes to "Le Devoir" over his own signature attest.

I have touched on Henri Bourassa the man, the orator, the writer, and now, what does he stand for?

When we come to consider this question there is a mass of misrepresentation that must be swept away. For instance, I saw it recently stated that the Bourassa movement, as it was called, is a clerical and racial campaign to extend the French language and Quebec institutions throughout Canada. Such a statement is palpably absurd. Mr. Bourassa, it is true, is a fervent Roman Catholic, attached to his faith and his language and a zealous champion of what he deems are the rights of his people when he believes the occasion demands it. But what of that? Are we

therefore to infer that his object is to extend the French language and Quebec institutions throughout the Dominion? It would be as logical to say that because Sir James Whitney is an Anglican and a champion of the rights of Ontario his object is to extend his faith and the institutions of Ontario throughout the rest of Canada, including Quebec. Such statements as the one alluded to are on a par with a great deal that is written about the Province of Quebec. The habitants of Quebec are not the ignorant, backward and priest-ridden people that too many in the sister provinces are lead to believe. They are a generous, honest, simple-living, hospitable, freedom-loving people, with a keen interest in public affairs, desiring to have their rights and feelings respected, but at the same time respecting the rights and feelings of others.

Let those who think that they can give pointers to the people of Quebec when it comes to the discussion of public affairs attend a political meeting in that Province, and they will be quickly disillusioned. What is wanted in Canada is more of the spirit shown by the president of the Literary and Scientific Society of Toronto University, when in introducing Armand Lavergne to a Toronto audience he said: "We are British as you are British and we glory in the right of free speech accorded to all British subjects."

Whatever may be thought of Mr. Bourassa's views, there is one inestimable service that he has rendered. He has stood for freedom of speech and independence of thought. Political parties are a necessity, but when party loyalty degenerates into abject servility the interests of the people are apt to suffer. Had Mr. Bourassa been content to be a mere party slave he might have enjoyed the sweets of office. As it was he preferred principle to party and independence of thought and action to the holding of office, and public life has been the gainer. Let that be remembered to his credit. Everybody is at liberty to differ from Mr. Bourassa, but his views are at least entitled to be fairly presented. Let Mr. Bourassa himself explain what he aims at.

It was recently my privilege to have a personal talk with the Nationalist leader, during the course of which he fully and frankly discussed the movement with which he is identified. It was while he was reviewing the situation that I put to him the straight

question: "What is the object of the Nationalist movement?" His reply was equally pointed and unequivocal. "The Nationalist movement," he said (I quote his words in substance), "is what I may call the search for a common ground for all Canadians and that common ground, I believe, can be found only in looking to the development of all our Canadian forces, mental, moral and material. You cannot, for instance, get all Canadians to agree in their views as regards Great Britain, but you may get all Canadians to agree on the building up of Canada and the creation of a truly national sentiment throughout the Dominion. And by devoting all our energies to the development of Canada we will, I hold, most effectively help to strengthen the Empire. Such a common ground as I speak of cannot, however, be found unless the English-speaking majority take into account the feelings of the minority just as the majority in Quebec respects the rights and feelings of the minority. There must be give and take on both sides. There is nothing of a racial, religious or sectional character in the movement, as has been falsely represented; it is an appeal to all Canadians of good-will, whether they be French-speaking or English-speaking, to unite for the welfare of their common country. The movement is essentially Canadian. We want to put the issue perfectly straight, the largest measure of autonomy for Canada compatible with the maintenance of British connection."

"Then you do not appeal simply to the Province of Quebec, but to the whole Dominion?"

"To the whole Dominion, naturally," quickly responded Mr. Bourassa. "The campaign has been begun in the Province of Quebec, because it is here that the forces we oppose have been concentrated. We are appealing to Quebec to break the yoke and to regard principles rather than attachment to any man. But our campaign will not stop there, and it will be carried into the sister Provinces and the issue Imperialism or Autonomy will be clearly defined and fought out. And from what I hear and read I am convinced that there are thousands of English-speaking Canadians who think as I do on this issue. Our appeal to the Dominion, of course, implies respect for the rights of the various elements that compose the Dominion. The principle of Confedera-

tion involves respect everywhere for the rights and liberties of minorities, just the same as the rights and liberties of the minority are respected in the Province of Quebec. In order that the spirit of Confederation shall be lived up to, it is in fact absolutely essential that the rights of minorities everywhere shall be respected."

"And what is your attitude in regard to Great Britain and so-called Imperialism?"

"We claim," answered the Nationalist leader, "that the best service we can render to Great Britain and the Empire at large is to look after our own country, to follow, in fact, the policy that was advocated by Sir Charles Tupper in 1893. If every part of the Empire does the same the Empire at large will be far stronger and more united for peace or for war than by trying to bring all parts to one standard of government and defence. We hold that what we advocate will strengthen rather than weaken the solidarity of the Empire. In fact, I consider it the worst possible thing, both for Canada and the Empire, to foster a false Imperialism, which must eventually result in grave perils and trouble. Let us before all, and above all, be Canadians; let us English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians unite our forces, let us develop our resources, let us build up a great country in which the rights of all shall be respected, let us carefully guard our autonomy, and we shall be rendering the best service, not only to Canada but to the whole Empire. That is the aim of the Nationalist movement."

Having heard what Mr. Bourassa has to say, let us turn now to another quarter. I take up a pamphlet issued some time ago by Mr. Olivar Asselin. It is entitled "A Quebec View of Canadian Nationalism: An Essay by a dyed-in-the-wool French-Canadian on the best means of ensuring the greatness of the Canadian Fatherland." It is dedicated to "the great English race." Mr. Asselin has played a conspicuous part in the Nationalist movement, and he has shown the courage of his convictions. And here a personal reference may be pardoned. In the copy of the pamphlet which Mr. Asselin was good enough to present to me he inscribed these words: "From a fair-minded man to a fair-minded man." He could have paid me no higher tribute or one that I would value or appreciate more. Fairness, respect for the views of others, even

when we are not able to agree with them, not narrowness, illiberality and misrepresentation, are requisite if we are to serve the interests of our common country. Let us respect the feelings of everybody, and let the views of all be heard. What has Mr. Asselin to say? His essay, which fills sixty-one pages of a good-sized pamphlet, is a most illuminating review of the whole subject, and it would be a good thing if it could be read by all Canadians and especially by those who are wont to grossly misrepresent the French-Canadians and to advocate that the Province of Quebec shall be ostracised simply because some of its public men take a certain view of a great question. Space will only permit me to quote the summary with which Mr. Asselin has prefaced his work, but that will suffice for my purpose. Here it is:

Nationalism as advocated by the recognised leaders of the Nationalist movement in Quebec aims at the upbuilding of a Canadian nation on the four following principles:—

"1. In Canada's relations with the mother country the greatest measure of autonomy consistent with the maintenance of the colonial bond.

"2. In Canada's internal relations the safeguarding of provincial autonomy on the one hand and the constitutional rights of minorities on the other hand.

"3. The settlement of the country with a sole view to the strengthening of Canadian nationhood.

"4. The adoption by both the Federal and Provincial Governments of provident, economic and social laws, that the natural resources of the country may be a source of social contentment and political strength."

The reader may form his own judgment of this programme.

One of the main factors in the strength of the Nationalist movement is the adherence of the younger element. Mr. Bourassa has as his lieutenants and fellow-workers a band of devoted enthusiasts. There is Armand Lavergne, for instance, the Rupert of the movement, amiable, witty, *débonnaire*, concealing beneath a modest demeanour an ability that will carry him far. Armand Lavergne has been heard at Toronto, where he succinctly defined the Nationalist creed as Canadian autonomy and British connection. Lavergne is one of the most effective campaign

speakers in Quebec. He has a manner that captivates an audience and a keen sense of humour. Not only can he crack a joke, but he can enjoy one even when it is at his own expense. An instance in point: It was during the campaign in Drummond and Arthabaska. Mr. Lavergne was addressing a great meeting of the electors at what is known in the Province of Quebec as *une assemblée contradictoire*, when both sides are heard, and was poking fun at one of the opposing orators who carried a large satchel filled with formidable looking documents. Mr. Lavergne, as is known, is the author of the law compelling transportation companies to print their tickets in both French and English. Beginning his address he said, "*Vous venez d'entendre le 'satchel' de M.——*" (You have just heard the satchel of M.——.) Instantly the crowd, with a keen sense of humour, seizing upon the English word, cried, "*Parlez francais*" (speak French). There were roars of laughter in which Mr. Lavergne heartily joined, though the joke was at his expense. The hardest workers for the Nationalist cause, such men as Olivar Asselin, Omer Heroux, Tarcrede Marsil, to mention only a few, are all charged with the spirit of enthusiasm. As I surveyed the great gathering at the Ontario rink, I could not help thinking that history was repeating itself. I recalled the time when, prior to the general election of 1896, I attended one of the closing meetings of the campaign held at Lachine and heard the Liberal leader prophesy that his party would sweep the country. I recalled, too, the great meeting held on the Champ de Mars in Montreal following the Liberal victory of 1896, when I stood on the platform beside Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Tarte and witnessed the great popular ovation of which they were the recipients. It was a scene of indescribable enthusiasm. The young men, the enthusiasts, those who work and struggle for a cause simply because they believe in it, surrounded the leaders. To-day Mr. Bourassa has the youth and enthusiasm on his side.

Let us now consider very briefly the attitude of Mr. F. D. Monk, M.P., and of those French-Canadian Conservatives who think as he does on the navy question. Mr. Monk, as is known, joined forces with Mr. Bourassa and the Nationalists in the Drummond and Arthabaska campaign. He was on the platform with

the Nationalist leader at the great Ontario rink meeting following the victory, and he received equally enthusiastic plaudits from the immense gathering. He was hailed by Mr. Bourassa on that occasion as the leader in the movement for the support of national autonomy. As a public speaker, Mr. Monk furnishes a rather striking contrast to Mr. Bourassa. He has less of the Gallic fire and more of the Saxon composure. But he is a forceful and convincing speaker who thoroughly weighs what he has to say and says it with clearness and precision. A commanding presence increases his power over an audience. I have more than once discussed the naval question with Mr. Monk, and there is no ambiguity about his views. He has been charged with disloyalty, has even been branded as a traitor to his country and his party, but he has never swerved in his course. People are at liberty to differ from him, but he can at least claim that he has been consistent in the course he has followed.

Mr. Monk's contentions are, briefly:

"1. That the navy policy of the Government, the decisions of the Imperial Conference of 1902, the change in our relations with the Empire have intentionally been removed from all expression of popular opinion and the freedom of that expression denied by the Government, though it was claimed by petition from many thousands of electors from every part of Canada.

"2. That the construction of the fleet proposed by the Government is to be condemned as involving a useless and ill-considered expenditure not calculated to help the Empire and violating the principle of representation, while placing upon the Canadian people responsibilities which it was eminently unfair to ask of them to assume under such intolerable conditions.

"3. That the enormous sums urgently needed at once for necessary works of development in Canada, such as canals, railways, and other aids to transportation must tax to the very utmost our available resources and credit and that the expenditure absolutely required for the navy could not now be undertaken."

The result in Drummond and Arthabaska, Mr. Monk holds, is a vindication of his attitude, and he further maintains that the appeal that was there made was one that could properly be urged

before the electors of any constituency in Canada. Nor is Mr. Monk alone among French-Canadian Conservatives in the attitude he has taken. Mr. Rodolphe Forget, M.P. for Charlevoix, who occupies a foremost position in the Canadian financial world, openly expressed the view that if there was an election in Quebec the result in every constituency would be the same and that those who said that Mr. Monk was not well advised on the navy question did not understand the feeling of the people of Quebec. Mr. Thomas Chase Casgrain, a former Attorney-General of the Province and member of Parliament, declared that what had taken place in Drummond and Arthabaska would take place at the present time in any ordinary constituency of Quebec. Other leading Quebec Conservatives have expressed similar views, so that Mr. Monk is not without strong supporters and adherents.

The views of the Nationalists have been given, the attitude of Mr. Monk and his adherents has been explained, and now—what of the future? Mr. Bourassa declares that the fight has but begun and that the campaign will be carried through the English-speaking provinces. "And let neither Conservatives nor Liberals be deceived," he says. "The fight of to-morrow, which has been preparing for the past ten years, will not be fought between two armies morally decimated and whose battle-flags cover no longer an idea or a principle. The battle will be fought out between Imperialists and Autonomists. The question will be presented fairly and squarely, and the Canadian people will choose between the two principles. And, whatever may be the issue, there will be no civil war as timid people fear. The minority will accept loyally the decision of the majority, reserving, of course, the right which is essentially British to use every effort to bring the majority to think as they do."

If Mr. Bourassa and Mr. Monk, acting in concert, should in the event of a general election carry a majority of the Quebec seats, what would be the result? Would it mean that they would hold the balance of power? Would it result in a coalition? These are questions that time alone can decide. But one thing is reasonably certain, that if the campaign that Mr. Bourassa and Mr. Monk have begun in Quebec is successful, they will have to be reckoned with.

JOHN BOYD.

